

THE LITTLE CANDLE

BY JAMES WFBER LINN

When Rodney Pinkham appeared among the candidates for the ValleySide Academy foot-ball team, the coach smiled.

"What's your name?" he asked.

Rodney W. Pinkham, sir.

You want to play football?

Yes, sir.

Why, said the coach good naturedly, you're no bigger than a Christmas candle!

The boys who heard him laughed, but Pinkham was not disturbed.

I weigh more than you think, sir, he said. I weigh one hundred and eight and one quarter pounds, and most of it is muscle, sir.

The coach smiled again.

Well, Mr. Christmas Candle Pinkham, he said, I like your spirit, anyway, and we'll see what you can do.

The first day there were exactly thirty-four men at practice, and when the three elevens lined up for signal practice, Pinkham found himself the one left over.

But he trotted along beside the coach without the least sign of annoyance, looking up at him seriously and listening attentively to what he said. The coach put him in at end for the last five minutes of formation work.

When it was over, he had all the candidates run from one end of the field to the other. Pinkham finished sixth. Hello! said the coach. You can run, can't you?

Yes, sir, said Pinkham.

Hello, Candle! said Tommy Horton, the halfback, winking to big Sloan, the centre. Aren't you afraid the rain'll melt you?

No, sir, answered Pinkham. After a moment he smiled, a shy, embarrassed smile. I guess that was a joke, wasn't it? he said. Sloan and Horton doubled themselves up with laughter. After that every one called him Candle Pinkham.

He appeared on the field every day, rain or shine. Football was his passion. When he got a chance in the scrimmage, which he soon did, he showed that his size was not altogether a disadvantage, for he could wriggle through a hole that nobody else on the squad could find and he was a very difficult person to dodge. In two weeks he was playing end on the "scrub" and was the proudest boy in Valley-side.

There's one thing about you, Candle, said the coach, one day. It's a real pleasure to see you play, you enjoy it so much.

Why, don't you think it's fun, sir? asked Pinkham, wondering.

Valley-side had excellent prospects that year. Sloan, the centre; Jimmy Edwards, the quarter back and captain, and Horton, the left half, were all remarkable players, and the rest of the eleven were at least average, with the exception of the right end. After three weeks the make-up of the team had been practically settled, save for that end position. After the Mountain game, Edwards and the referee were talking it over.

There's just one man in Valley-side who could make good there, I'm perfectly sure, said Edwards. That's Bab. But he won't come out, confound him! You know he played for Blount School last season and he was a star. When I heard he was coming here, I gave up worrying about one end. But I've talked to him a dozen times, and I can't move him; he won't try.

What's the matter with him? asked the coach.

He's got a bee in his bonnet, answered Edwards, crossly. He says he doesn't like the game.

Why not?

Says it's bad for a man. He isn't afraid of getting hurt, either, but you see, he was ruled off twice for hitting a man last year, and he has never got over it. I don't think he's a dirty player; they say he had provocation both times. But he's a queer chap; I can't make him out. He says that he loses his temper when he plays, and does things he has no business to do, and so he has made up his mind not to play.

He'd better make up his mind to keep his temper, said the coach.

That's what I told him, Edwards replied. But he said, he had an idea that if you found you couldn't resist temptation, the next best thing was to avoid it, and that was what he meant to do. And I can't get another thing out of him.

Well, said the coach, if we can't get him, we can't. Now I'll tell you something, Jimmy. I'm half inclined to give young Pink-

ham a show at end.

What? demanded Edwards.

The Candle!

Just so. Of course he's awful-

ly light, but he's wiry and fast,

and never seems to get hurt. He's

far and away the most faithful

worker on the squad; you can

absolutely depend on him to do

as he's told, and best of all, he's

got football sense.

There's something in what you

say, admitted Edwards, thought-

fully. Then he laughed. What

do you think I saw him doing

yesterday noon? Throwing a foot-

ball up on that sloping roof

at the west end of the dormitory,

and catching it as it came off. It

would bounce every way, and

now and then he'd miss it; and

when he did, he'd fall on it every

time; he never picked it up once!

Oh, he loves the game, all right,

said the coach.

That afternoon, when the coach

lined up the first eleven for sig-

nal practice, he called:

Pinkham, take you right end!

The boy actually jumped.

What, sir—?

he said.

Hurry up! answered the

coach. And Pinkham's eyes

shone, like the candles he was

named for as he trotted to his

place.

The game that week was with

Neoka. The field was wet and the ball slippery. The first time

Tommy Horton was given the

ball, he squeezed it out of his

arms before he was fairly

started.

There was a wild scramble.

When the players of both sides

were untangled, at the bottom

was Candle Pinkham the ball

buzzed tight to his stomach.

Valley-side made three more fumbles in the first ten minutes, and

in two out of three little Pinkham

saved the ball. Then Valley-side

braced and scored.

Rah, rah, rah, Horton! yelled

the crowd; and then, after a mo-

ment, Rah, rah, rah, Pinkham!

Through the dirt on his face the

boy's embarrassed smile made

its way.

Neoka kicked off, and the run-

ning and smashing began again.

So, also, did the fumbling. At

last Valley-side's right half

got the ball, circled the opposing

end, but was caught by the de-

fensive half back; and as he was

tackled the ball flew high and

wide. Pinkham, racing behind,

caught it on a lucky bound, and

pushed on; but the opposing full-

back tackled him squarely, and

down they went in a heap.

Neoka's captain and right tackle,

a boy weighing a hundred and

seventy pounds, came up, and

as the referee's whistle blew,

hurled himself squarely upon

Pinkham and the full-back. There

was a roar and hiss from the

stands. When Horton and the

referee pulled the men apart,

little Pinkham did not move.

Dirt! Take him out! yelled

the stands. The umpire slapped

the Neoka captain on the shoulder. Get off the field he said, curtly. Quick, now!

What for? asked the boy, an-

grily.

You know very well, said the

umpire. You heard the whistle,

didn't you? I won't have any

dirty play here. You get out.

The Valley-side coach was work-

ing over Pinkham. The boy

gasped and drew his legs up to

his body; then he shook himself

and opened his eyes.

I'm—I'm all right, sir, he said.

I guess I had my wind knocked

out, that's all.

Can you stand? asked the

coach.

Of course I can, said Pinkham,

getting unsteadily to his feet.

I'm all right, sir, he said.

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answered Edwards, crossly. He

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